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Security Assistance in a post-interventionist era:
The impact on limited statehood in Lebanon and Tunisia

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Abstract: Post-interventionist security assistance is premised on non-normative security understandings and pragmatic and flexible arrangements between external and local actors. In practice, the hybrid nature of many political regimes or the existence of areas of limited statehood means that these forms of assistance, while strengthening specific aspects of a country's security context, reinforce some domestic actors vis-à-vis others thanks to processes of selective borrowing by local political elites. This paper demonstrates how such processes can further contribute to the proliferation of hybrid elements in the country's security sector. In two contrasting case studies, we illustrate how security assistance packages in Lebanon and Tunisia have ended up diluting emerging democratic reforms, and produced more coercive manifestation of state power.

Keywords: security assistance, limited statehood, Tunisia, Lebanon

1. Introduction

Security assistance – activities that aim to train, equip, reform and advise foreign security forces¹ – is at the forefront of international actors' engagement across the Maghreb and the Levant. Disillusioned by the failures of externally-driven statebuilding, contemporary security assistance is increasingly 'post-interventionist', as the liberal democratic aims of the statebuilding era have been replaced with pragmatic and ad hoc donor assistance presented as light footprints and technical assistance. However, such post-interventionist security assistance is likely to have effects that go much beyond effectiveness and enhanced capabilities.

¹ This broad definition follows US terminology, as identified in United States Government Accountability Office, Building partner capacity: key practices to effectively manage department of defense efforts to promote SA, GAO-13-335-T (Washington DC, 14 Feb. 2013).

Drawing on empirical research into the modality and effect of security governance in Tunisia and Lebanon, two emblematic cases of contemporary security assistance in the Maghreb and the Levant, the paper makes two key arguments. First, *in lieu* of comprehensive political strategies with set objectives for security interventions, domestic security actors – state and non-state, military and civilian – selectively borrow from external models of security governance. These sub-national strategies must be understood and analysed in the context of the limited statehood in which they operate, beyond reductionist labels such as ‘spoilers’. Current security assistance engages with sub-state and, if not directly with so in spaces where non-state actors operate, and the consequences of these engagements must be understood at both local and national levels. Second, the aggregated effect of uncoordinated, pragmatic security assistance is the creation of empowered security actors, and in this article, we discern a tendency towards either militarization of traditionally civilian tasks as is the case in Lebanon, or of unintended de-democratization effect by favouring ad hoc and supposedly technical changes without new normative frameworks in the security sector, as is the case in post-2011 Tunisia.

Two strands of literature have particular relevance for exposing current practices and effects of security assistance as it is currently unfolding in the Maghreb and Levant: literature on the changing nature of international-local linkages in the context of security governance, and research on the nature of Middle Eastern and North African political regimes. There are clear links between these two literatures, but they rarely intersect in productive ways. The first strand has exposed the shift from global interventionism to global self-policing, to borrow Chandler’s (2016) terms. Whereas interventions in the 1990s and early 2000s were explicitly aimed at heavy-handed statebuilding of ‘failed states’, the failure to construct sustainable peace, let alone liberal democratic states, in key cases such as Afghanistan and Iraq shifted international efforts towards more fluid security governance practices. Security assistance has since been driven by ‘complexity’ approaches, in which the objectives and modalities of the interventions are ad hoc and pragmatic, while reaching wider and deeper into local societies (Moe and Mueller 2015). Security governance relies on resilience (Chandler 2014), capacity building (Bueger and Tholens forthcoming), and ideas of self-policing/governmentality and local ownership (Gheciu 2005). As such, it is seemingly less driven by external models of ‘good governance’, and more by identifying ‘local solutions to local problems’. Yet, as research indicates, there is considerable external power projected onto local societies also in this new era of security governance, and the challenge remains to trace and explore such power dynamics. Despite a decreasingly normative discourse, external security assistance is far from normatively or politically neutral and continues to respond to political objectives and interests.

The second strand of research is concerned with conceptualising how fragile political orders outside the Western orbit, which undertake change or reform in their security sector, become sites of contestation between existing systems and external interferences or influences, and often develop mixed orders. Namely, far from being automatically transposed in third countries' settings, external 'solutions' become part of a wider process of negotiation between external actors and local political societies, which, despite ever existing power asymmetries, enjoy varying degrees of autonomy and political agency, which they make use of when taking decisions over security reforms. The hybridity emerging from the negotiation between local practices and external solutions manifests itself in potentially contradictory and ambivalent changes linked to partial and adapted transfers of norms, institutions, practices within existing normative and organizational structures (Schroeder, Chappuis and Kocak 2014; Hanau Santini and Moro 2017).

Hybrid forms of security governance are especially the product of the interaction between external security assistance and security demands by fragile political orders. In so-called Areas of Limited Statehood (ALS), the capacity to implement and enforce central decisions and a monopoly on the use of force are not given. In these polities, non-state actors, including external ones, and non-hierarchical modes of steering are systematic. The restriction of statehood can occur on different levels: functional or sectoral (only in some policy areas); territorial (only on some parts of the territory); temporal (only for a certain amount of time) and social (only with regard to specific parts of the population) (Risse 2013).

How do external actors engaged in Security Assistance tasks and local actors interact, and how does this interaction shape local security governance architectures and the political trajectories of these countries? By merging the critical literature on security assistance with a critical account of local agency and hybrid governance, this paper disentangles the impact of external interventions in the security sector, exposing effects of negotiated security assistance by local political orders in areas of limited statehood. We take as illustrative examples Tunisia and Lebanon, both displaying hybrid features and limited statehood in their security sector, and deeply affected by external security assistance programs (Hanau Santini, forthcoming; Tholens 2017).

The article proceeds first by uncovering the changing political nature of the global politics of security assistance and the role played by external actors in exporting models of security governance. It proceeds by looking at how this interacts with security reforms in fragile, post-conflict or post-authoritarian polities. In particular, it singles out the role local agency plays in rejecting, adopting or adapting security reform packages or interventions promoted by international actors. Thirdly and finally, it empirically investigates how the security sector has been object of proposed reforms in post-

revolutionary Tunisia since 2011 and how the EU Security Sector Reform (SSR) agenda has been only formally invoked but resisted by local elites, who welcomed other, more technical forms of Security Assistance after the 2015 terrorist attacks. The case of Lebanon, on the other hand, has witnessed massive security assistance, but very few calls for reform or systemic change. The result is competition over externally derived resources, and sub-national strategies to attract funding and support to sect-based security agencies. Hybrid systems of security governance are further deepened, and the Lebanese security sector is increasingly militarized and locked in non-transparent and confessional political dynamics.

2. Global Security Governance practices and the politics of the technical

Global security governance has gone through generations of scholarly attention, reflecting changing practices on the one hand, and scholarly trends on the other. We may arguably divide the field of recent 'intervention studies' into three main time periods: liberal peacebuilding optimism of the 1990s; critical peace studies of the 2000s; and a rejuvenated post-interventionist era characterising the 2010s. The normative perspective, the ontological and epistemological premises have changed significantly during these periods. In general, we have witnessed an increasingly critical scholarly articulation of the processes defining security governance, and a broadening of the ontology under scrutiny. Whereas the practice has changed in parallel, current security governance as it unfolds in the Maghreb and the Levant is both a product of and reproducing past generations of security interventionism.

The core aspect of security governance that intervention studies have grappled with throughout these broadly defined periods, is the composition and effect of international-local interactions and linkages. What happens when the international (or external) enters into and 'meets' the local (or domestic)? During the 1990s, most scholars were cautiously optimistic about the prospect of international intervention in conflict affected areas, and their analyses centred on the (unfulfilled) potential of international efforts to protect conflict affected societies. Whether through peacekeepers or the introduction of liberal norms and governance models, the outlook was largely one whereby the international community *did not do enough* in weak or fragile states and societies that were ridden by civil strife and 'ethnic' or otherwise communal conflict (Doyle and Sambanis 2006). This optimistic outlook gradually changed, as the failures or shortcomings of liberal peacebuilding in cases such as Kosovo, Bosnia and Afghanistan, in conjunction with the Global War on Terror (GWOT) and the devastating invasion of Iraq, radicalised not only its protagonists but also researchers of interventions during the first half of the 2000s. This led to an increasingly critical intellectual articulation of the aims, means and outcomes of activities under the heading of global liberal governance, which scholars saw

as a practice ultimately aiming to reproduce the Western liberal state (Ignatieff 2003; Richmond 2005; Chandler 2006). The tension and corrosive character of international-local relationship were thus exposed, revealing that imposing 'global' norms on fractured and contentious polities assumed to be blank slates was not only futile; it was inherently neo-colonial (Darby 2009). In parallel, the international community gradually turned away from statebuilding as a favoured intervention practice. This was partly due to its obvious lack of success, but also due to public opposition to risking soldiers' lives in distant locations, as well as to the change in perceived threats: whereas the 1990s and early 2000s had focused on fragile states and the security-development nexus as a key problem of global stability, defeating terrorist networks, organised crime, or piracy came to define the global security agenda as the GWOT set in.

The critical peacebuilding research agenda evolved, but mostly remained with the assumption that the struggle lies between global or foreign norms and discourses and local politics. Work on the 'local turn' in peacebuilding focused on the significance of domestic agency to understand the outcome of peacebuilding processes (MacGinty 2010), while others sought to unpack how knowledge is diffused through security governance interventions, distinguishing between norms and rules, organisational structures and technical capacities (Schroeder, Chappuis and Kocak 2014). Most significant perhaps, are efforts to understand the outcomes of international interventions as creating conditions for 'hybrid peace' where liberal and illiberal norms, institutions, and actors co-exist and clash (Jarstad and Belloni 2012; Richmond 2014). Pertinently, hybrid security governance (Schroeder, Chappuis and Kocak 2014) captures how domestic actors borrow selectively from international assistance 'packages', so to combine elements of domestic and external governance in new or hybrid spaces. 'Friction' between the 'global' and the 'local' is here exposed as a modality of liberal interventionism (Björkdahl and Höglund 2014; Millar et al. 2013), and serve as a useful starting point for excavating contemporary security interventions.

Yet, it is not – or no longer – friction between pre-conceived global norms and local actors or realities that take centre stage in current security assistance, and certainly not in the Maghreb and the Levant. Instead, new modalities of delivering security assistance based on the amorphous idea of 'capacity building' uncover international-local linkages that are premised on negotiations over knowledge specific to time and space, and which are invasive in inexplicit ways. International actors come with priorities and 'best practice' solutions, but so do local actors. The result is a fluid, pragmatic, ad hoc and flexible assemblage, whereby effects must be measured by the production of new arrangements that empower some and marginalise others. Three perspectives concerned with the 'local turn' in security interventions are particularly enlightening.

First, recent work on resilience as a new or revised paradigm of interventions uncover how political ideas embedded in the neoliberal peace paradigm are still central to international engagements in conflict affected countries. The discourse has changed, from universal ideas of democratic and liberal governance towards language that emphasises the strength at local and societal level in tackling crises. In post-interventionism, namely, intervention “focuses on the empowerment and responsibility of agency at the local societal level, rather than upon the assertion of the right of external sovereign agency” (Chandler 2012: 216). By so doing, intervention enters deeper into society, as it involves mechanisms of self-policing by decentralised societies and communities, and yet it does so with less explicit aims and objectives (ibid 221). Work on the post-interventionist resilience paradigm has brought our attention to the changing nature of interventions, and to the increasing emphasis on local responsibility to build sovereignty in a ‘bottom-up’ manner.

The second strand of research deals with complexity approaches, which particularly stress the role of local agency vis-à-vis contemporary forms of security assistance. Moe and Mueller (2017) show how ‘turning local’ in counter-insurgency (COIN) warfare enables expansion of its practice and reach, rather than scaling down. In fact, “as malign, criminal and “deviant” societal dynamics (from drug trafficking to jihadism) are identified as key dilemma, enabling “positive” resilient or self-securing social dynamics emerge as the way forward” (ibid: 20). Complexity approaches to counter-insurgency, promoted by key US military counter-insurgency strategists such as General David Petraeus, General Stanley McChrystal and David Killcullen, propagate the idea that the mission is protecting the people, not destroying the enemy, illustrative of how COIN has changed character over the last decades (ibid: 6). Complexity approaches, contrary to thinking about this shift as a depoliticised rupture with liberalism, depict this shift as effectively producing a growing militarization of ‘the social’ and the everyday (see Moe and Mueller 2017; Khalili 2013; Niva 2013).

This leads us to briefly consider a third approach to exploring how the ‘local turn’ in interventions connects global ideas, discourses and practices with political societies targeted by security assistance programs. Following on from Saskia Sassen’s (2008) work on how the dual processes of state disassembly and (global) reassembly create new forms of social interaction practices that reconfigure distinctions between public and private, and between global and local, Abrahamsen and Williams propose ‘global security assemblages’ as a means to analyse how a ‘range of different security agents and normativities interact, cooperate and compete, to produce new institutions, practices and forms of security governance’ (2009: 3). Treating contemporary security assistance as a global security assemblage allows us to focus on how different agents and the normativities they espouse interact and compete in contexts described as ‘fragile’. In such ‘fragile’ contexts, state and non-state actors interact in ways that defy expectations of sovereignty, as is typical in areas of limited statehood. The

“multi-scalar security arrangements” that characterise global security assemblages create new geographies of power, and are produced by “complicated politics over how and who should be involved” in governing specific assemblages (Sandor 2016: 495). As such, negotiations, interpretations and contestations over what global discourses and security practices mean in local contexts come to the fore.

Summing up, this section has pointed to the recalibrated nature of security interventions, and the politicised effect it has on local communities rather than central authorities. In the next section, we explore how political systems characterized by areas of limited statehood in the Maghreb and the Levant demand specific conceptualizations as to the modality and effects of security assistance, with a special focus on how we can understand implications for delicate state-society relations.

3. The effects of Security Assistance in areas of limited statehood

This paper aims at further exploring a still under-studied topic in international security which revolves around the shapes and effects produced by the interaction between external actors engaging in security assistance and domestic actors in contexts characterized by Areas of Limited Statehood, by looking at two empirical cases in the MENA region, Tunisia and Lebanon.

While finding the notion of hybridity fruitful as far as it captures a wide range of degrees of security governance solutions resulting from the combination of local and international elements, different conceptual lenses, such as ALS, can offer more fine-grained insights when analysing these local political orders. The article will namely refer to states displaying areas of limited statehood, be they geographic and/or functional.

Hybridity has been referred to as combining different kinds of agency, external and domestic, with only partially overlapping logics (Schroder, Chappuis, Kocac 2014). By other authors, hybridity has been used to depict the coexistence of traditional and modern forms of authority, making up fundamental mechanisms of everyday governance (Bacik 2008; Fregonese 2012). To their merit, these approaches contribute to a broader understanding of domestic agency, and successfully rectify the ‘weak state’ or deficit perspectives by honing in on the strength of societies in contexts where the central state is weak. The idea behind hybrid political orders is their non-teleological nature, as opposed to notions derived from liberal statebuilding or neo-Tillyean state formation approaches (Chojnacki and Branovic 2012). However, among scholars using the notion of hybridity, the emphasis in terms of the concept’s connotation shifts from the dichotomy formal-informal; external-domestic; traditional-modern, providing it hard to operationalise and covering a descriptively wide range of

governance arrangements. If the critical literature stigmatizing the use and abuse of notions of 'weakness' applied to the analysis of non-Western states now abounds, this is not the case for the recent use of the notion of hybridity, whose underpinnings are supposedly non-normative, as the term rejects binary classifications and standard dichotomies opposing modern and traditional, strong and weak, and so on, but whose conceptual vagueness and attribution with different meanings has hollowed out the employability of the notion. However, while talking of hybrid political orders fails to specify the degrees and different qualities of hybridity, hybrid security governance captures the combination of recipient countries' security sectors' norms, organizations and practices with some elements derived from external actors' security assistance normative or policy transfers.

These efforts include but go beyond security sector reform programs in fragile, post-conflict and, we add, post-authoritarian polities. The SSR agenda, as mentioned above, has gone hand in hand with liberal statebuilding projects and has received similar criticisms concerning its normative connotation as far as its twofold goals are concerned, namely, the democratic governance ambition ruling the use of violence by the state and the civilian control of the military (Schroder, Chappuis and Kocak, 2014). Beside the Eurocentric trap of defining different forms of configuration of political authority diverging from Weberian idealtypes as weak forms of states, what goes missing as a consequence of the normative design of these policy programs is a more realistic assessment of the sources of local power settings and equilibria. While governance of the security sector could be influenced by practices considered as 'traditional' as opposed to 'modern' forms of authority, such as patronage or clientelistic networks, efforts by international security assistance efforts focusing on the centralization of the control over security forces, might also prove detrimental to the democratizing effects of the SA agenda. In order to engage local agency when investigating and analysing security cooperation, domestic actors' choices of rejecting, adapting and adopting external donors' reforms in the security sector should be clearly distinguished. Very often, bargaining processes imply dynamics of 'selective borrowing' (Stone 2012) from local governments of only some elements of the proposed reform packages. The combination of existing security institutions and practices with those newly selected and implemented can generate different forms of hybridity in the recipient country's security sector. Reform packages can be articulated along three dimensions, whose elements can be selectively adopted in isolation one from the other: at the meta-level, we find the transformation of norms and rules of the security sector, at the meso-level, the transformation of the organizational structure and at the micro-level the transfer of practices, or technical capacities (Schroder, Chappuis and Kocak 2014).

The qualitative empirical analysis in the second part of the paper aims at illustrating how transposing a normative agenda have been fraught with shortcomings and deficiencies and how alternative efforts of more standard and supposedly ‘technical’ SA, have been more successfully negotiated with local elites. Understanding how local contexts and external normativities form assemblages with important consequences for domestic politics will be at the core of the empirical analysis, with special attention to local agents’ capacity to adapt international security agendas to serve sub-national interests.

4. Between a rock and a hard place: post-revolutionary Tunisia’ security sector

Post-revolutionary Tunisia represents an interesting example of the hybridity that can be generated once different external security assistance packages are proposed, negotiated, selectively borrowed and implemented according to the domestic political preferences of some key policy actors. While in the early stages of the transition, Tunisians converged over the idea of a complete overhaul of the security sector, which, under Ben Ali had developed increasingly authoritarian practices, behaving like a community police without oversight and amounting to a modern form of hyper-localized surveillance system (Hibou 2006), the democratization of the security forces initially foreseen failed to take place. Tunisia in the early aftermath of the uprising in 2011 asked the EU to come forward with a Security Sector Reform agenda as part and parcel of its democratization process. Once political assassinations shook the country’s fragile equilibrium in 2013, however, priorities shifted and so did political equilibria. A formal decision over the adoption of a SSR package took a long time to be finalised and even longer to be implemented. By no means this indicated a lack of changes in the broad security sector, which tended to occur mostly on the operational level, within an altogether different multilateral policy framework, that of the G7+. The security assistance format inaugurated with the G7+ in late 2015, in the wake of the Bardo and Sousse terrorist attacks, provided more flexible arrangements. The Tunisian government negotiated the kind of assistance, mostly in terms of training and infrastructures, that it wished to receive. The European Security Sector Reform agenda, with its emphasis on transferring norms and rules proved to be less appealing than a multilateral and flexible framework involving also non-European countries, including the United States, willing to offer new policy tools, most notably technical capacities, and, to some extent, although remaining mostly at an informal level, changes in the organizational structures, with a centralization of coordination tasks in the hands of the Tunisian Presidency of the Republic.

The rest of the analysis on the Tunisian case study will expand on how from an initial EU SSR package foreseeing transfer of norms and of capacities, the shift, caused by a combination of historical contingent factors (the two terrorist attacks and the need to respond quickly in order to increase the efficiency of counter-terrorism operations as well as the charisma and powers of the President of the

Republic Caid Beji Essebsi) has ended up reinforcing the efficacy of the security forces without contributing to deeper changes in the norms and rules regulating the use of force by the security sector.

In the immediate wake of the Tunisian uprising, the urgency of reforming a discredited security sector was widely shared. Under intense public pressures, the interim government in place between January and October 2011 adopted swift measures in order to purge the security bodies from their most compromised officials. In particular, between January and March 2011, Farhat Rajhi, a reformist Interior Minister, dismissed the most compromised security commanders, forced 42 senior MoI officials into mandatory retirement – including all 26 members of the General Directorate for National Security – and disbanded the Directorate for State Security, which had been accused of the majority of torture allegations (Sayigh 2015). Similar decisions were taken by Interior Minister Habib Essid between March and December 2011, then by Interior Minister Ali Laarayedh between December 2011 and March 2013, and by Lotfi Ben Jeddou after him (ICG 2015). This occurred without an overall strategy of reform and as a series of ad hoc initiatives, including not only dismissals *ad personam*, but also campaigns of recruitment and promotions as motivated by electoral calculations (ICG 2015).

This piecemeal and un-systematic approach did not change even after two prominent politicians, Mohamed Brahmi and Choukri Belaid, were killed by terrorists in 2013, and the country risked a potentially violent paralysis.

Beside the lack of shared political will across the political parties' spectrum and the mistrust from the security forces vis-à-vis the Islamist Ennahda party, reform attempts were also hindered by the organizational legacy from the Ben Ali era in terms of lack of coordination and direct communication among ministries and security agencies, part of the regime's coup-proofing strategy, mostly based on keeping a small and apolitical army detached from the reins of power, firmly established in the Ministry of Interior and the police forces. Since Bourguiba, the military had been kept outside the political process, its role constrained to defending borders and national sovereignty. This mistrust increased after the 1962 unsuccessful coup attempt against Bourguiba. Coup-proofing took not only the shape of marginalization by keeping the army small and under-funded, but also of counterbalancing: both Bourguiba and Ben Ali, namely, increasingly relied on and empowered the security apparatus under the control of the MoI (Bou Nassif 2015: 270-271).

Since 2011, the intra-institutional competition among security bodies, notably between the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Interior, manifested itself on the operational level with mishandling of security threats, and on the strategic level with the lack of coordination among institutional bodies, each of them drafting White Papers or National Security Strategies (Ben Mafoudh 2014).

With the 2013 political assassinations, public opinion shifted from demanding democratic reforms of the security sector to more efficient forces in dealing with terrorist and security threats in general (Kartas 2014). The debate focused on the ability or its lack thereof of the various security bodies – the army, the National Guard, the police – to effectively coordinate among themselves, together with the quality of the training received. The shift in focus and emphasis from legitimacy to efficiency, far from being neutral, legitimized a more selective borrowing from the side of the Tunisian government vis-à-vis security assistance packages than what had been previously the case. Norms and principles included in the EU SSR (including transparency, accountability, fight against corruption and democratic control alongside technical aspects such as support to integrated border management, enhancing intelligence, modernizing security forces in their recruitment and training) could be put on hold while changes would be undertaken on the operational and technical assistance level. Despite an initial request by the Tunisian government to the EU for SSR support as early as October 2011, it took two years before Tunisian authorities agreed on the terms of reference for a peer review of the security sector. The decrease in salience of the security reform issue was a combination of diminished public opinion pressure on the topic, bureaucratic delays and the prioritization by the Constituent Assembly of issues considered more urgent during the early stages of the transition. From October 2011 until January 2014, the Assembly namely carried out a twofold function as both a Constituent Assembly and a standard legislative house, something which slowed down reform efforts not directly tied to the new Constitution. In December 2013, twelve European security experts produced a peer review report. Pending approval by the Tunisian authorities, it was only in January 2015 that a European identification and formulation mission was allowed to go on the ground. The process accelerated only in the wake of the 2015 terrorist attacks, first at the Bardo national museum in Tunis where 21 people lost their lives and few months later on the beach of a hotel resort in Sousse (where 38 European tourists were killed), with the signing the Commission's proposal for a security sector reform in November 2015, with a budget of 23 million euro (European Court of Auditors 2017). Since then, the program has had a very slow implementation: the first contracts were signed in mid-2017, after a lengthy procedure both on the EU and the Tunisian side (Interview, EU Delegation, June 2017). Of a much quicker adoption and implementation by the Tunisian government was the technical assistance offered within the framework of the G7+, formally inaugurated in June 2016.

The genesis of this new policy format dates back a few days after the attacks in Sousse, when the British Home Secretary and the Interior Ministers of France and Germany visited Tunisia and pledged enhanced security support. The informal E3 - France, Germany and the UK - joined the other members of the G7 and at the G7 meeting in Schloss Elmau in June 2015. This was thought to build on the 2011 Deauville partnership, which had until then neglected the security dimension of cooperation.

Following on a formal Tunisian request, the G7 group also included Spain, Belgium, and the EU, and became the G7+.

As a coordination framework, the G7+ aims at sharing information among partners on the ongoing security-related bilateral initiatives with Tunisia. It operates with an executive committee, meeting every three months and providing strategic guidelines, and a number of operational working groups. In terms of increasing efficiency of technical assistance, the G7+, as compared to separate, potentially competing and overlapping bilateral security initiatives by the EU and the US, has offered key advantages. First, it has allowed to include the United States in security cooperation, while not depriving altogether EU member states to continue their bilateral initiatives, within a framework characterised by a slightly more transparent information sharing mechanism which on the one hand limits duplications and on the other provides less incentives for the Tunisian authorities to ask different donors for similar tools and resources. On the Tunisian side, the initiative has required an improved intra-ministerial cooperation, and it has pushed Tunisian political actors to come up not with mere 'shopping lists' of equipment or training needs, but with formulations of strategic outlooks and visions. This was facilitated by a powerful presidency of the Republic, with President Essebsi, in power since the first democratic presidential elections in late 2014, enjoying a high personal charisma and legitimacy. These were utilized to facilitate communications and coordination among different security forces, by centralizing decision-making over security policy in the Presidency of the Republic. Despite the hybrid parliamentary nature of the post-2014 political system, President Essebsi managed to centralize decision-making and strengthen the executive, especially in security matters, by over-extending the label of 'national security' (Abbes 2017). This effort was facilitated by his defense advisor, Admiral Kamel Akrouf, who presides over all G7+ meetings, coordinates the security decision-making process, eases tensions among different ministries' bureaucracies, facilitates compromise and reports back to the President (Interviews, European embassies, Tunis, June 2017).

The G7+ operates across four different working groups (WGs): the protection of tourist/sensitive sites, co-led by Tunisia and the UK; borders, co-led by Tunisia and Germany; ports and airports, co-led by Tunisia, France and the UK, and counter-terrorism, co-led by Tunisia, France and the EU. While this exercise has improved coordination among security bodies in Tunisia and cooperation with external donors, accountability and rule of law, as any other policy transfer related to norms and principles, has been watered down.

The selective borrowing by the Tunisian government of a specific form of multilateral in format but bilateral in nature Security Assistance only concerned the aspect of technical assistance, while no new legislative frameworks for the security sector or organizational structures have changed. Agency on

the Tunisian side, however, was not limited to passively accepting 'train and equip' elements of the G7+, but also, thanks to the initiatives spearheaded by the Presidency of the Republic, manifested itself in the elaboration and adoption of new security strategies. In terms of legislative framework, namely, the National Security Council, a body composed of the key Ministers dealing with security and defence issues and placed within the Presidency of the Republic, existing already under Ben Ali was reinvigorated by the new President, and provided the impetus for the drafting of a new national strategic document. Since the initiative came directly from the President, in November 2016, the document was eventually adopted as the National Strategy Against Terrorism and Violent Extremism. While the document has not been published, it identifies four pillars for countering the terrorist threat which neatly correspond to the EU's 2005 Counter-Terrorism (CT) strategy: Prevent, Protect, Pursue and Respond (Personal interviews, Tunis, June 2017). While not directly traceable back to external reform attempts or policy designs, the almost identical formulation of the National Strategy Against Terrorism with the EU Counter-Terrorism strategy represents an example of institutional isomorphism which comes close to some form of adaptation even in the legislative reform dimension.

In terms of legislative innovations promoted within the G7+ broad framework, in March 2016, the government created an ad hoc body, the National Counter-terrorism Commission. The commission approved the counter-terrorism strategy and strove to implement the July 2015 counter-terrorism law. The law had been passed in the aftermath of the Sousse attacks and had been criticised by several advocacy groups for the re-introduction of capital punishment in the legal system, the extension of detention without the right to have access to a lawyer for 15 days and in general for the lack of human rights' provisions in it. While under a more consistent SSR package, the law might have been object to criticism by involved external actors, the technical nature of the SA format, within a fluid context in Tunisia, with heightened security threats and many elements of the former regime, especially in the security sector, still in place, enabled for questionable if not draconian provisions. Another case is represented by the draft law 25/2015, law which is supposed to be in defense of the armed forces but whose formulation ends up forbidding criticisms to the security forces. This bill is time and again taken up by the government and submitted to Parliament, as was the case in November 2017, stirring up much controversy and social polarization. The bill foresees that anyone accused of « *using, possessing, circulating or hiding a national security secret* » could face a ten year prison sentence (Article 5), that any person deemed « *guilty of affront to armed forces* », could face up to two years in prison (Articles 7 and 12), while « *blocking the normal flow of services, institutions and establishments of armed forces in any way* » would be punishable by a three-year prison sentence (Article 11) (Szakal 2017). Within a cherry-picking approach as the one encouraged by the G7+ which co-exists with ongoing bilateral initiatives and fails to provide an overall consistent reform format, there is little incentive that external

actors, even if they wanted to, could deploy in order to push for normatively inspired security sector reforms.

To conclude, the exogenous shock represented by two terrorist attacks was capitalized both by key European states as well as by key Tunisian policy entrepreneurs – the President of the Republic Beji Caid Essebsi and his Security Advisor, Kamel Lakrou- which, as illustrated above, used the crisis as a catalyst to promote new security initiatives premised on the centralization of power in the hands of the executive.

Secondly, Security Assistance replaced Security Sector Reform: if security performance by the Tunisian security forces improved thanks to the G7+ efficacy, the technical nature of SA had the upper hand in driving policy change, while reform efforts impacting on the re-organization of discredited security agencies failed to see the light. The tailor-made SA by external donors, moreover, impacted on the evolving nature of the Tunisian political system, by strengthening the Presidency of the Republic, which, despite a constitutional emphasis on parliamentary democracy, widened its powers and, by opaquely steering the decision-making in the security arena, decreased the role of both the parliament and the government, represented by the prime minister. In a way, one could argue, supposedly technical and locally demanded reforms ended up reinforcing elements of hybridity in the security arena if not altogether in the Tunisian political system. Namely, while some changes and reforms allowed to streamline decision-making processes and in terms of effectiveness, granted an improved inter-ministerial coordination and greater cooperation facing security threats, thereby positively contributing to output legitimacy of the Tunisian political system vis-à-vis its public opinion, several elements have remained critical in their display of hybrid, when not authoritarian, provisions and laws aimed at granting impunity, lack of accountability of the security forces vis-à-vis citizens potentially deprived of now constitutional rights. The implementation of the 2014 Constitution on the one hand, and of these more draconian laws, such as the 2015 Counter-terrorism law or the likely approval of the 25/2015 bill on the protection of the armed forces all testify to the continuation of hybrid elements in the security elements which have been kept alive and well also thanks to external actors' SA efforts which have by and large legitimised the modus operandi of the security sector.

5. The reinforced hybridity of the Lebanese security governance

Security Assistance to Lebanon takes place within the framework of UNSC Resolution 1701 of 2006, which called for Lebanon to “exercise its full sovereignty, so that there will be no weapons without the consent of the Government of Lebanon and no authority other than that of the Government of Lebanon” (UNSC 2006). After decades under Syrian military control, Resolution 1701 paved the way

for unprecedented investment by Western donors and their allies in security assistance to the poorly developed and deeply sectarian Lebanese security agencies. The bonanza that has ensued, whereby multiple and at times competing donors support their specific niche, is still poorly understood. In particular, the effects such sustained external support to specific security agencies have, in the absence of a coherent and coordinated strategy, on Lebanese statehood is as of yet not uncovered. Resolution 1701 was designed to disarm powerful contenders to Lebanese state structures, but the loosely defined mandate and intensification of geostrategic competition in the Middle East in recent years have deepened and widened the hybrid nature of Lebanese security governance.

Hybridity in Lebanon is descriptive of the coexistence of formal and informal socio-political structures, which interact and compete so to make up a truly hybrid security order. The lengthy civil war in Lebanon (1975-1990), and the subsequent period of Syrian domination until its withdrawal in 2005, prevented centralization and consolidation of state powers, and produced alternative structures with strong social ties as well as viable military capabilities. Hezbollah, supported by Iran and the Assad regime in Damascus, is arguably the strongest force in the country (Norton 2009), but other armed factions operate out of the Palestinian refugee camps. In 2007, battles between Lebanese security forces and armed groups in the Nahr al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp exposed the presence of armed elements on the territory of Lebanon, and a number of Sunni extremist groups have launched attacks on both civilian and military targets since 2011. In addition, state security agencies do not operate according to a coherent and hierarchical national strategic framework. Instead, they are sectarian by constitution, and interact through modes of competition and mistrust. Civilian control is present through political parties and sectarian affiliation rather than as a function of central state control. As such, even formal security institutions operate a certain hybridity compared to traditional understanding of state security. Finally, community defense groups and other informal groupings operate in the large space left out of formal (security) politics. The security governance situation in Lebanon is altogether consistent with the notion of limited statehood, where the state is but one contender to managing security politics.

While the 2006 UNSC Resolution 1701 authorized the provision of security assistance to Lebanese security institutions, it was the outbreak of the Syrian civil war that prompted intensification and diversification of such SA. Between 2006 and 2011, donors sought to build capacity of the Lebanese security institutions in order to counter Hezbollah, primarily, but priorities turned to more immediate stability concerns after 2011. Western donors and regional Middle Eastern powers sought to shore up 'their' sectarian group in the traditionally hotspot of Lebanon, and prevent further regionalization of the Syrian quagmire. As a consequence, billions of dollars' worth of security assistance have entered the country, while some of this, notably Saudi Arabia's 2013 promise of 4 billion dollar in military aid

mainly delivered by France, have been retracted as perceptions of Hezbollah's influence of the government is growing (Lang and Awadallah 2017). As has been discussed elsewhere, security assistance after 2011 has been couched according to three key global security discourses: counter-terrorism, border control/sovereignty, and migration management (Tholens 2017). Strikingly, no explicit normative model has been framed according to which security assistance should develop. The result is that each donor promotes its own interpretation of security governance, and operates largely bilaterally. For example, between 2005 and 2016, the United States provided roughly 1.4 billion dollars in assistance, and by 2015, Lebanon had become the fifth-largest recipient in the world of U.S. Foreign Military Financing.² In 2017, even before the recent battles with al-Qaeda affiliated groups along the Syrian border exposed how deep and efficient coordination between Lebanese army and Hezbollah have become, the new Trump administration had proposed to zero out security assistance to Lebanon.

Donor coordination is formally a matter for the Support Group for Lebanon, established by the UN Secretary General with then Lebanese President Michel Sleiman in 2013. The International Support Group consists of the UN, China, France, Germany, Italy, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as the EU and the Arab League. It's intended to mobilize support and assistance for Lebanon's stability, sovereignty and state institutions, especially to the Lebanese Army and with special reference to the large influx of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The Support Group is commonly thought to be a rather shallow mechanism, with little actual coordination capacity. It issues statements in times of crises and provides the veneer of donor coordination, but given the complex dynamics of Lebanese security politics it is unlikely to address thorny issues that security assistance is confronted with on the ground. It is probably fair to say that most donors prefer this lack of transparency, as centralization and formalization in Lebanon implies paralyzing negotiations over resource distribution. Lack of stated objectives, moreover, allows the proliferation of short-term projects and changes along the way without significant accountability attached.

Weakly coordinated security assistance is a practice with parallels across the world. While the EU keeps on promoting Security Sector Reform in some localities, such as in Tunisia, it isn't done so in Lebanon, primarily because there is no political interest – among domestic or international actors – for such restructuring of the security sector. Instead, strategic concerns drive security assistance in Lebanon, notably seeking to beef up national institutions (at the expense of non-state forces) in order to preserve stability along the Blue Line in the South, cooperate with UNIFIL in that respect, protect the country's borders from spill-over from the war in Syria, prevent terrorist safe heavens, and manage global flows of people and goods from passing through. While these are all key ingredients in classic

² See <http://securityassistance.org/data/program/military/Lebanon/>

statebuilding processes, security assistance is also molded by more specific geopolitical concerns: the geostrategic relationship between Lebanon and Israel, and the role of Hezbollah as a proxy of Iranian influence. Managing and balancing these concerns are key to unpacking the modality and effects of security assistance in Lebanon.

The surge in security assistance then, is largely taking place without an overarching strategic framework or coordination mechanisms. It is striking to note the lack of a normative model pursued among key donors: in the US Congressional Budget Justification on Foreign Operations for Fiscal Year 2017, for example, bilateral aid to Lebanon is envisioned as purely strategic, i.e. it explicitly seeks to “mitigate Iranian, Hezbollah, and Sunni extremist threats and influence in the country” (U.S. Department of State 2016, p. 179). The US’ priorities are manifested in its operational focus, notably the training of Special Forces aimed at counter-terrorism operations, including the assistance of the Lebanese Special Forces School (Lang and Awadallah 2017). While we know that training under the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program are embedded with a normative focus, such as ‘Western values’ and ‘democratization’, it is entirely left to the backburner to formulate a reformist agenda in Lebanon. Even if smaller projects focus on civil-military relations and integrated border management, these represent bottom-up attempts at gradual changes rather than any coherent security model. There is surely a common understanding of who does what among the many Western donors, but it is also official that coordination works on an informal level, and along a ‘niche approach’, in which each donor operates in a given niche, and there is tacit understanding that each niche is exclusive unless otherwise agreed. Guiding principles for the what, who and how of security assistance are *perceived* rather than explicit, and must be seen in a geopolitical context, where Lebanon is a battleground between powerful interests in the region. For example, maintaining Israel’s Qualitative Military Edge prevents the delivery of heavy and strategic weapons, but nowhere is this written or codified.

Effects of SA on hybridity are first of all the deepening of sectarian division and competition. Donors are keen to enter into specific niches in order to remain relevant and influential, with the consequence that each donor country has ‘its’ partner institution to which it channels funds, training and, eventually, normative ideas about how to organize efficient security provision. For example, the US and the UK are the main donors working with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), while France works primarily with General Security (GS) and the specific niche of airport security. The US has also invested considerably in developing the Internal Security Forces (ISF – the police), while the EU runs a longer term project on border management. Lebanese security institutions are steeped in sectarian politics: a fine balance between Lebanon’s many sects is maintained through appointments and reshuffles. The ISF is headed by a Sunni, GS by a Shia, and the various leadership positions of the LAF is allocated

across the confessional spectrum (see Nerguizian 2015, pp. 115-116 for an account). Smaller but significant institutions such as Lebanese State Security and Customs are the subject of negotiations between Maronites, Druze, Armenian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, and other confessional communities designated under the Ta'if Agreement. Inevitably, enhancing the capacity of one security institution has an impact on confessional politics, and strengthening one can easily mean threatening another. Lebanon's sects are fully aware and mobilized in the face of this new possibility for obtaining new resources from external donors.

Moreover, SA with "no strings attached" contributes to support the tacit partnership between the LAF and Hezbollah, which contravenes the mandate of Resolution 1701 but which most analysts see as a necessity in the Lebanese context. Hezbollah is probably the best armed organization, the most influential political party, and the most efficient social welfare provider, which makes it a force impossible to avoid in the dense Lebanese landscape. The relationship between LAF and Hezbollah has always been nurtured and sustained through tacit agreement and accommodation (Alami 2014). For international actors, that relationship has been problematic and controversial; for the Lebanese it is essential to managing everyday security politics, and Hezbollah's narrative of armed resistance against Israeli aggression is to some extent accepted also beyond its core sympathizers. 12 years after Resolution 1701, the LAF is a strengthened force with capacities and capabilities beyond expectations (Shabb 2014). Yet, also Hezbollah has enlarged its role and considerably boosted its capabilities, particularly through its engagement in the Syrian civil war, which has showcased its military strength and prompted new recruitment and increased weapons supplies by its Syrian and Iranian backers. Meanwhile, the Sunni community in Lebanon is wary of the LAF-Hezbollah cooperation in targeting 'extremist' Sunni groups, especially in hotspots such as Aarsal and generally in the Bekaa valley along the Syrian-Lebanese border. Since the outbreak of the civil war in Syria, Sunni-Shia tension has soured further in the already tense environment that has seen fierce political factionalism since the murder of president Hariri in 2005. The LAF has always been revered as the "only truly national institution", and while this self-styled narrative is somewhat inflated, popular support for the LAF depends on the continued perception of such neutrality. In a series of events, much applauded by Western donors, the LAF has cracked down on Islamist groups, appearing to withstand pressure from the volatile border with Syria. It is evident that these crackdowns could not have taken place without Hezbollah collusion, and their increased cooperation has been well documented (Schenker 2017). While this development contravenes Western donors' intentions – Hezbollah is on the US' terrorist list and is of course the proxy of its main adversary in the Middle East, Iran – it is also an example of a complex assemblage, whereby strengthening one actor leads to intensification of the hybrid security governance already in place, locking international-local dynamics in a dependent relationship. The LAF has been trained,

equipped and mentored by the US and the UK primarily, and the complex learning that takes place is driven both by external normativities defining counter-terrorism as well as by the operational landscape that is specific to Lebanon. Collusion with Hezbollah is a necessity on the ground in parts of Lebanon, especially the South-East and in Beirut southern suburbs, and when the LAF wants to be relevant and apply the lessons learned from its American and British trainers, then they need to work next to those that control strategic territory. The 2017 Qalamoun Offensive against the Sunni group Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (formerly Al-Nusra Front) and ISIS proved how closely LAF and Hezbollah are able to cooperate, with the LAF deploying heavy artillery against the militants while Hezbollah engaged in street battles. That former LAF Commander General Michel Aoun, a Maronite Christian whose party Free Patriotic Movement is politically affiliated with Hezbollah, became President in 2016 and the bizarre December 2017 resignation of the (Sunni) Prime Minister Saad Hariri on live TV from Saudi Arabia consolidated the deep abyss of confessional politics that Lebanon is currently finding itself in. Security Assistance has arguably contributed to deepening these sectarian divisions by being focused on capabilities and direct links with specific security agencies instead of insisting on a political framework of support and reform. Strengthened security actors bare little optimism for political consolidation – much needed in the paralyzed Lebanese state.

In the context of massive security assistance, the absence of any overarching strategic reform framework, such as SSR, is indicative of the new generation of ‘complexity’ approaches. Lebanon has received billions of dollars worth of military aid and security assistance, and 12 years after UN Resolution 1701 we can witness improved efficiency of security agencies – and a notable absence of large-scale civil strife – but we witness ever deepening sectarian tensions and a resort to increasingly coercive expressions of the state. Security institutions, which after the 2005 Syrian withdrawal were politically weak, under-resourced and inefficient are now ever more present in the daily affairs of ordinary people. Yet, their relevance is defined by non-transparent negotiations beyond the scope of civilian control. Before such democratic control is established, we can expect further securitization of Lebanese politics to take place.

Some have described Lebanon as a case of ‘hybrid sovereignty’, made up of an assemblage of different actors and interests, and constituent of a system of plural governance of security (Hazbun 2016). What we can also observe is that external normativities are channeled through security assistance packages, and that this hybridity – evidenced in particular through the LAF-Hezbollah evolving relationship – is deepening as a consequence.

6. Conclusions

Security Assistance models and practices have taken different shapes in Tunisia and Lebanon and yet display striking similarities. While in Tunisia efforts at a comprehensive SSR package have been initiated in the aftermath of the 2010/2011 uprisings, although they have only very slowly made progress and their implementation remains far-fetched, in both countries ad hoc, pragmatic and technical capacity oriented Security Assistance frameworks have been designed. In both cases, they have no strings attached, and they have ended up reinforcing hybrid features of the local political systems, while strengthening security institutions and enhancing the overall security performance of the local institutions.

The Tunisian government has ‘selectively borrowed’ a specific form of multilateral SA framework, the G7+, which operates on a bilateral basis, with the aim of building capacity among security agencies without pushing for changes in the discredited legislative or organizational frameworks regulating the security sector, a heavy legacy of the previous authoritarian regime. Tunisian agency has manifested itself in the elaboration and adoption of new security strategies, spearheaded by the Presidency of the Republic, beyond negotiations over ‘train and equip’ elements foreseen by the G7+. Eventually, however, supposedly technical and locally demanded reforms ended up reinforcing elements of hybridity in the security arena if not altogether in the Tunisian political system. This occurred with a parallel process of increased efficiency enabled by the streamlining of the security decision-making process, an improved inter-ministerial coordination and greater cooperation facing security threats, and, on the other hand, with the continuing existence of hybrid, when not authoritarian, provisions and laws aimed at granting impunity, lack of accountability of the security forces vis-à-vis citizens. The tailor-made SA by external donors, moreover, impacted on the evolving nature of the Tunisian political system, by strengthening the Presidency of the Republic, which, despite a constitutional emphasis on parliamentary democracy, widened its powers and, by opaquely steering the decision-making in the security arena, decreased the role of both the parliament and the government, represented by the prime minister.

In Lebanon, where statehood is limited both functionally, with a non-state actor, Hezbollah, playing an essential role on the coercive level, as well as geographically, with the southern part of the country remaining a strategic area of concern for the central authority unable to unequivocally assert its predominance once and for all, strategic concerns have driven security assistance. This has occurred notably under the guise of the UN led Support Group for Lebanon, which has failed to stir donor coordination, and evaded discussions of strategic direction and political ownership over the security sector, which has increased the degree of hybridity already displayed by the complex Lebanese

political system. Different SA donors have failed to clearly spell out their SA models, and focused on specific niches such as counter-terrorism, border-control and management of migration. This has meant ending up pursuing different geopolitical priorities on the ground, including beefing up national institutions (at the expense of non-state forces) in order to preserve stability along the Blue Line in the South, cooperating with UNIFIL, protecting the country's borders from spill-overs from Syria, preventing the creation of terrorist safe heavens, and managing migratory flows. The first and foremost consequence of such uncoordinated SA has been the deepening of sectarian division and competition among aid recipients. Hybridity, in this case, has been a function of individual donors' wishes to cultivate relations with specific sectarian groups and clients so as to preserve their influence.

The complexity turn, with its focus on interaction between external donors and local central authorities negotiating the terms of engagement, offers some clues as to how the current intensity in security assistance impacts on the ground. When coupled with a more functionalist framework such as that of Areas of Limited Statehood, we begin to discern how local political elites harness donor priorities to serve particular sub-state interests. In both cases analysed in this article, external security assistance has significantly impacted upon local political orders undergoing change or transformation within volatile environments and has increased the hybrid features of local security governance settings. In both Tunisia and Lebanon, the influence played by external donors in strengthening selected local actors and favouring hybrid forms of sovereignty, is indicative of the new generation of 'complexity' approaches in security assistance. Despite a decreasingly normative discourse, contemporary interventions have implications for security governance and subsequently for political processes in the target country. It is of utmost importance to further research what the lack of comprehensive approach to security assistance means for domestic politics – in the Middle East and North Africa, and beyond.

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